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Written statement* submitted by Reporters Sans Frontiers International - Reporters Without Borders International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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THE STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOM: DASHED HOPES AFTER SPRING

The 2014 World Press Freedom Index[1] spotlights the negative impact of conflicts on freedom of information and a new trend to interpret security needs in an abusive manner.

The annual "indicator" of the global level of media freedom published along with the 2014 index, shows 61 points increase in violations, going from 3395 in 2012 to 3456 in 2013, + 1.8 %.

This indicator of overall performance, based on a variety of measures used to compile the index such as violence, pluralism, media independence, quality of legislation shows that although 2013 was less deadly for journalists than 2012 there are increasing physical attacks and threats against media personnel. All regions except Asia registered a worsening of the right to impart and receive information.

- The 2014 index underscores clearly that information has become collateral damage during armed conflicts, both open and undeclared.

Syria, a prime example, now rubs shoulders with the bottom three on the Index list. The Syrian crisis also had a dramatic impact throughout the region with increased polarization in Lebanon, a tightening of the Jordanian authorities' grip and an accelerating the spiral of violence in Iraq.

In Iran, a key Mideast country, none of the new president's promises to improve freedom of information have yet been implemented. Coverage of the Syrian tragedy, in both the official Iranian press and on the blogosphere, is closely watched by the government, which cracks down on any criticism of its foreign policy.

In Africa, deteriorations were registered by Mali, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In Egypt, the election of Mohamed Morsi was accompanied by an increase in abuses against journalists and all-out efforts for the Muslim Brotherhood's control of the media while the army's return to power ushered in a persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood that affected not only Egyptian journalists but also their Turkish, Palestinian and Syrian colleagues. In the Persian Gulf, especially in the United Arab Emirates, bloggers and journalists were arrested and charged with having links to the Brotherhood.

- Information was sacrificed on the altar of national security in countries taking pride in their democratic practices when they too often subjected freedom of information to overly broad and abusive interpretations of national security needs.

This has been the case in the United States amid increased efforts to track down whistleblowers and the sources of leaks. The conviction of Private Bradley Manning and the pursuit of NSA analyst Edward Snowden were warnings to those thinking of disclosing sensitive information that would clearly be in the public interest.

US journalists were also stunned by the Department of Justice's seizure of *Associated Press* phone records without warning in order to identify the source of a CIA leak. It served as a reminder of the urgent need for a "shield law" to protect journalists' sources at federal level.

This revival of the legislative process was of little consolation for *The New York Times'* James Risen who is under a court order to testify against a former CIA employee accused of leaking classified information. And less still for Barrett Brown, a young freelance journalist facing 105 years in prison in connection with the posting of information that hackers obtained from Statfor, a private intelligence company with close ties to the federal government.

The United Kingdom distinguished itself in the 'war on terror' by the pressure it placed on *The Guardian* newspaper and the 9-hour detention of David Miranda, journalist Glenn Greenwald's assistant.

The "war on terror" is also being exploited by governments that treat journalists as "threats to national security" with dozens being jailed on this pretext in Turkey, Morocco or Israel.

In Japan, the "special intelligence protection bill" recently adopted by the National Diet reduces government transparency on such key national issues as nuclear power and relations with the USA, making them taboo subjects

- The privatisation of violence which has had an impact on newsproviders and non-state groups constitutes the main source of physical danger for journalists in a number of countries.

Militias fomenting chaos in Libya and Yemeni armed groups linked to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula are leading examples of this phenomenon. Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the M23 movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo both regard journalists as enemies. Jihadi groups such as Jabhat Al-Nosra and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) use violence against news providers as part of their drive to control the regions they "liberate."

Organized crime is also a fearsome predator for journalists in many parts of the world, especially in Honduras, Guatemala, Brazil and Paraguay as well as in Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and the Balkans where self-censorship becomes unavoidable on subjects such as drug-trafficking, corruption and the criminal penetration of the state apparatus. The passivity of authorities towards violence against the media, their connivance or even direct involvement, ensures impunity for those responsible.

- There were some big falls.

In the Americas, the 13-place fall registered by the United States (see above) was more than doubled by Guatemala which saw a two-fold increase in the number of physical attacks on journalists, including four murders, and was equalled by Paraguay with an increasing pressure on journalists to censor themselves.

Kenya registered an 18-place fall with the government's response to the media's coverage of the Westgate Mall attacks compounded by dangerous parliamentary initiatives, including a recent law creating a special court to judge audiovisual content.

Kuwait's 13-place fall reflects the tougher measures taken against the media, including the law allowing the authorities to fine journalists up to 300,000 dinars (1 million dollars) for criticizing the Emir and the Crown Prince, or misrepresenting their words, and the imposition of prison sentences of up to 10 years on journalists insulting God, Prophets of Islam, Prophet Mohamed's wives or companions.

Still at the bottom of the Index we find Viet Nam, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, to name but three that are successfully adapting their radical censorship to the digital era. As for Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, media pluralism is in the process of succumbing to the increasingly repressive tendencies of rulers clinging to power.

- ...And some big rises.

Violence against journalists, direct censorship and misuse of judicial proceedings are on the decline in Panama, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Ecuador, although in Ecuador, the level of media polarization, still high, serves as a barrier to public debate.

The past year was marked by laudable legislative developments in some countries such as South Africa where the president refused to sign a law that would have endangered investigative journalism.

In Georgia, the 2013 presidential election was less tense that the previous year's parliamentary elections, but media polarization might still continue to be a challenge.

Israel's 2014 rise is offset by its 20-place fall in the 2013 index as a result of Operation "Pillar of Defence" in 2012, when two Palestinian journalists were killed, the many raids it carried out against Palestinian media and the abusive treatment of Palestinian and foreign journalists by the Israel Defence Forces, especially during the weekly demonstrations at the Separation Wall. On 4 December, an Israeli high court endorsed the seizure of equipment from *Wattan TV* during an IDF raid in February 2012.

- Some regional models appear to be declining with, for some countries an impact on their neighbours because of their regional importance and influence and the fact that they are regarded – rightly or wrongly – as models to be watched or followed.

South Africa's 11-place rise to 42nd position contrasts with the performance of other countries regarded as regional models, which have either shown no improvement or are in decline.

EU Members' scores are more uneven, a trend accelerated by the economic crisis and outbreaks of populism. In Greece, journalists are often the victims of physical attacks by members of Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi party. By closing the state broadcaster under pressure from the Troika (EC, ECB and IMF), the Prime Minister seems to be cutting back on democracy to save money.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Orban gives the impression of having abandoned press freedom in his zeal for draconian reforms.

Russia might have been lower in the index had without the determination of its civil society in the face of an intensifying the crackdown since Mr. Putin's return in 2012 and the Russian model is being exported throughout the former Soviet Union to countries eagerly copying its methods.

Turkey registered no improvement. The Gezi Park revolt highlighted the repressive methods used by the security forces, the increase in self-censorship and the dangers of the prime minister's populist discourse.

China failed to improve its ranking. Despite having an astonishingly vital and increasingly militant blogosphere, dissident bloggers and journalists are still censored and jailed and the county's influence is reaching the media in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

India experienced an unprecedented wave of violence against journalists, with eight killed in 2013. They are targeted by both state and non-state actors. No region is spared but Kashmir and Chhattisgarh continue to be the only two where violence and censorship are endemic.

Myanmar, with its substantial reforms registered a big leap in 2013 and could become a regional model for a transition to democracy. However, with a flagging reform process, the "Burmese model" has yet to prove itself.

As last year, Finland tops the index for the fourth year running, closely followed by Netherlands and Norway. At the other end of the list, the last three positions are again held by Turkmenistan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Eritrea, countries where freedom of information is non-existent.

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[1] http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php